

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8212
INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUSAKA 1395

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PINS ZA
SUBJ: ZAMBIAN INTERNAL POLITICS: KAUNDA'S POSITION

REF: (A) LUSAKA 243, (B) LUSAKA 258, (C) LUSAKA A-14,
(D) STATE 94660 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: THERE IS WIDESPREAD DISCONTENT WITH THE ZAMBIAN GOVERNMENT, THE PARTY AND PRESIDENT KUANDA. THIS MOOD OF DISCONTENT ARISES MAINLY FROM DEPRESSED ECONOMIC CONDITIONS WHICH TOUCH THE LIVES OF ALMOST ALL ZAMBIANS. ADDING TO AND MIXING WITH DISSATISFACTION OVER THE POOR STATE OF THE ECONOMY IS A MOOD OF DISILLUSIONMENT OVER THE EXTENT OF ZAMBIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE LIBERATION STRUGGLES OF SOUTHERN AFRICA IN GENERAL AND ZIMBABWE IN PARTICULAR. THIS GENERALIZED DISCONTENT TAKES AN ADDED SIGNIFICANCE DURING A YEAR OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS WHEN BOTH FRIENDS AND OPPONENTS OF THE PARTY SEE THIS MOOD AS EITHER A DANGER OR AN OPPORTUNITY. ELECTION FEVER BRINGS CRITICISM TO THE FORE AND REKINDLES OLD POLITICAL RIVALRIES WHICH OTHERWISE MIGHT HAVE REMAINED MUTED. GIVEN THE RELATIVE FREEDOM OF THE
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PRESS IN ZAMBIA, WHICH ALLOWS SHARP CRITICISM OF THE PARTY AND GOVERNMENT (BUT NOT KAUNDA), AND THE READINESS OF INDIVIDUAL ZAMBIANS TO CRITICIZE, THE CASUAL VISITOR TO ZAMBIA MAY LEAVE WITH THE IMPRESSION THAT KAUNDA'S DAYS ARE NUMBERED. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THIS IS THE CASE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE ZAMBIAN ECONOMY IS NOW IN THE WORST STATE IT HAS BEEN

SINCE INDEPENDENCE. PRICES FOR VIRTUALLY ALL COMMODITIES ARE RISING PRECIPITOUSLY, SHORTAGES OF ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES ARE WIDESPREAD, UNEMPLOYMENT IS INCREASING, AND THERE IS NO RELIEF IN SIGHT. UNSOPHISTICATED AND SOME SOPHISTICATED ZAMBIANS, LIKE PEOPLE EVERYWHERE, TEND TO BLAME THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY AND THEIR CONSEQUENT INABILITY TO MAKE ENDS MEET. THERE ARE HIGH-RANKING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND SUBSTANTIAL PRIVATE ZAMBIAN BUSINESSMEN WHOSE CRITICISM HAS A SHARPER FOCUS. THEY SEE THE PARTY AND KAUNDA'S COMMITMENT TO HUMANISM/SOCIALISM AS PARTIALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR ZAMBIA'S ECONOMIC WOES. WITHIN THE PARTY AND GOVERNMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, THERE IS DEBATE ON WHETHER ZAMBIA SHOULD CHANGE ITS ECONOMIC COURSE MORE TOWARDS A CAPITALIST ORIENTATION. ECHOES OF THIS DEBATE, ADDED TO THE MORE GENERALIZED DISCONTENT, GIVE RISE TO AN IMAGE OF A GOVERNMENT UNDER SEVERE CHALLENGE. THIS IS AN EXAGGERATION OF THE SITUATION.

3. MANY ZAMBIANS ALSO BLAME THE DEPRESSED STATE OF THE ECONOMY ON THE NATION'S SACRIFICES IN SUPPORT FOR THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE IN ZIMBABWE, RATHER THAN AS DUE TO BASIC WEAKNESSES IN THE ECONOMY. TO THEM, THE COST TO ZAMBIA OF CLOSING THE RHODESIAN BORDER AND HIGH PRICES PAID FOR COMMODITIES READILY AVAILABLE IN SOUTH AFRICA AND RHODESIA AT CHEAPER PRICES SYMBOLIZE THEIR SACRIFICES. STILL OTHERS SEE THE GOVERNMENT'S PREOCCUPATION WITH RHODESIA AS LEADING TO NEGLECT OF THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE COUNTRY. IN TRUTH, NEITHER A RHODESIAN SETTLEMENT NOR A MOVE TOWARDS GREATER PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT, HOWEVER, WILL
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CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO AN IMPROVEMENT IN ZAMBIA'S ECONOMY. THE KEY IS A DRASTIC RISE IN THE PRICE OF COPPER. NONETHELESS, THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IS NOT CRITICAL ENOUGH TO AFFECT PRESIDENT KAUNDA'S RE-ELECTION, AND IT IS NOT LIKELY TO BECOME SO. IT MAY, HOWEVER, HAVE A BEARING ON THE ELECTION OF SOME MPS.

4. IN ADDITION TO THOSE WHO ARE CRITICAL OF ZAMBIA'S RHODESIA POLICY BECAUSE OF THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES SUFFERED BY ZAMBIA, THERE ARE SOME WHO SUPPORT THE NATION'S COMMITMENT TO THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE BUT QUESTION WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS UNDUE SUPPORT FOR ONE PARTICULAR ELEMENT OF THAT STRUGGLE, I.E. JOSHUA NKOMO AND ZAPU. THE UNHAPPINESS OF THIS GROUP LIKELY HAS BEEN EXACERBATED BY THE SALISBURY AGREEMENT, WHICH THEY MAY FEEL SHOULD BE GIVEN A CHANCE TO PROVE ITSELF BEFORE ZAMBIANS ARE CALLED UPON TO MAKE FURTHER SACRIFICES.

5. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND OF DISCONTENT BORDERING ON DIS- ENCHANTMENT, INCREASING SPECULATION HAS DEVELOPED REGARDING PRESIDENT KAUNDA'S PERSONAL POLITICAL POSITION. AS REPORTED

EARLIER (REF A), THERE HAS BEEN SOME TALK AMONG PROFESSIONAL POLITICIANS AND BUSINESSMEN OF CHALLENGING KAUNDA'S LEADERSHIP.

MORE OFTEN, HOWEVER, THE SPECULATION INVOLVES HOW KAUNDA WILL HANDLE THE SITUATION RATHER THAN HOW THE SITUATION WILL HANDLE HIM. IT IS VIRTUALLY INCONCEIVABLE THAT ANYONE OTHER THAN KAUNDA WILL BE CHOSEN AS UNIP'S CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT. GIVEN ZAMBIA'S CONSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE, WHEREBY THE REGULAR PARTY MACHINERY SELECTS THE SOLE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES THERE IS NO PLAUSIBLE COMBINATION OF FORCES WORKING WITHIN THAT MACHINERY WHICH IS LIKELY TO CHALLENGE KAUNDA'S LEADERSHIP, OR BE SUCCESSFUL EVEN IF SUCH AN ATTEMPT WERE MADE. THIS, OF COURSE, ASSUMES THAT KAUNDA CHOOSES TO RUN, AND THERE HAS BEEN NOTHING TO SUGGEST THAT HE IS CONSIDERING STEPPING DOWN.

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6. THUS FAR, AT LEAST, THE DISCONTENT AND DISSATISFACTION WHICH EXISTS AMONG THE GENERAL POPULACE SEEMS TO TRANSLATE INTO APATHY RATHER THAN ACTIVE OPPOSITION. AS A CASE IN POINT, THE ROAN PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTION IN LATE JANUARY, UNDER WHAT WOULD SEEM TO HAVE BEEN IDEAL CIRCUMSTANCES FOR DEMONSTRATING DISCONTENT, GENERATED VERY LITTLE IN THE WAY OF AN OPPOSITION VOTE, BUT RATHER WAS NOTABLE FOR ITS DISMAL TURNOUT (REF B).

7. WE WOULD LIKEWISE JUDGE THE ODDS TO BE VERY SLIM THAT KAUNDA WILL NOT GAIN A HEALTHY MAJORITY OF "YES" VOTES IN THE GENERAL ELECTION. ZAMBIANS, DESPITE THEIR UNHAPPINESS, DO NOT APPEAR READY TO VOTE AGAINST THE MAN WHO HAS BEEN THEIR LEADER SINCE THE DAYS OF THE INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE. NEVERTHELESS, A STRONG POSSIBILITY DOES EXIST THAT THE PERCENTAGE OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS ACTUALLY SHOWING UP AT THE POLLS WILL BE EMBARRASSINGLY LOW.

THE VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE NOW UNDERWAY IS RUNNING INTO PROBLEMS (ITEM III REF C), BUT INITIAL INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE RESPONSE IS BETTER THAN SOME HAD EXPECTED (PERHAPS DUE TO RUMORS THAT REGISTRATION CARDS WILL BE REQUIRED IN FUTURE TO OBTAIN GOVERNMENT SERVICES). HOWEVER, REGISTRANTS MAY NOT TURN INTO VOTERS AND KAUNDA COULD BE RETURNED WITH A BADLY CONFIDENTIAL

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WEAKENED MANDATE, BUT THIS STILL WOULD HAVE LITTLE EFFECT ON HIS ABILITY TO GOVERN.

8. WHILE THE PRESENT MOOD OF THE COUNTRY, AS WE READ IT, WOULD SEEM TO BE LEADING TO AN ELECTION IN WHICH SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS CHOOSE NOT TO VOTE RATHER THAN TO VOTE "NO" FOR KAUNDA, THE SAME MAY NOT BE TRUE FOR PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES. ALTHOUGH ALL THOSE STANDING WILL BE MEMBERS OF UNIP, MANY FAMILIAR POLITICAL FACES COULD BE VICTIMS OF VOTER DISCONTENT, AND WE MAY SEE A SITUATION IN WHICH THOSE INDIVIDUALS LEAST IDENTIFIED WITH PRESENT PARTY AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES WILL BE ELECTED TO THE NEW PARLIAMENT. IF SO, THE ELECTIONS COULD WELL STIMULATE A MAJOR RESHUFFLE OF THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP.

9. THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE THAT THERE IS SERIOUS PLANNING AMONG ELEMENTS OF THE POLITICAL RIGHT OR WITHIN THE MILITARY FOR A COUP TO REPLACE KAUNDA. UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, MORE-OVER, THERE IS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT ANY SUCH PLANS COULD SUCCEED. A COUP FROM THE RIGHT WOULD NEED THE SUPPORT OF THE MILITARY, AND THE PROBABLE GOALS OF THESE TWO ELEMENTS IN ATTEMPTING TO FORCE A CHANGE WOULD NOT APPEAR TO BE COMPATIBLE. WHILE THERE HAS BEEN GRUMBLING WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES ABOUT BEING "HELD BACK" FROM STRIKING AT THE RHODESIANS, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE MILITARY NOW CONSTITUTES A THREAT TO CIVILIAN RULE (SEE PARA 9 REF A). SHOULD MAJOR RHODESIAN INCURSIONS TAKE PLACE, HOWEVER, THE MILITARY MIGHT FEEL COMPELLED TO TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS.

10. A MAJOR FACTOR IN CONSIDERING KAUNDA'S POSITION IS THE DEARTH OF POLITICAL FIGURES IN ZAMBIA WHO POSSESS A BROAD ENOUGH BASE OF SUPPORT TO BE PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVES. ALTHOUGH SIMON KAPWEPWE IS THE SUBJECT OF SOME SPECULATION, WE STILL BELIEVE HE IS MORE LIKELY TO BE COOPTED THAN TO CHALLENGE. CONFIDENTIAL

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WHILE THERE MAY BE PLANNING AND PLOTTING TO REARRANGE THE CURRENT BALANCE OF POLITICAL FORCES, THAT BALANCE WOULD STILL INCLUDE KAUNDA AT THE TOP. HIS POSITION IS NOT AS FIRM AS IT

ONCE WAS, BUT, UNLESS PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES ARE DRASTICALLY
ALTERED, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT HE IS ABOUT TO FALL OR BE TOPPLED.
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